



CDSS

CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF
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NEWS RELEASE

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California Department of Social Services Announces Improved Access to Disability Payments to Homeless Individuals

SACRAMENTO – John Wagner, Director of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), announced today the implementation of the Cooperative Homeless Office-Initiated Consultative Examination (CHOICE) process. The process aims to improve access and reduce the length of time necessary in determining eligibility for federal disability benefits for California's homeless population. In essence, the CHOICE process streamlines the scheduling of a medical exam when it is determined to be a necessary step in the disability evaluation process for homeless individuals.

"Our commitment is to get as much support as possible, as quickly as possible, to the state's homeless individuals," said Wagner. "Many times, it is difficult for the homeless to access Supplemental Security Income (SSI) services and benefits, but, with this new process, eligibility determinations can be made in a more efficient manner."

The CHOICE process is used during the initial face-to-face application interview at a local Social Security office and allows homeless applicants to immediately receive a consultative medical examination appointment, free of charge. Under the previous process, homeless applicants waited until CDSS received the disability claim before assessing the need for a medical exam.

"This successful innovation can reduce the disability eligibility determination period by several weeks and has proven an effective way to maintain contact with homeless applicants," Wagner continued. "It's an excellent example of inter-agency collaboration that produces improved performance and outcomes at no additional cost."

CHOICE Goes Statewide

CDSS's Disability Determination Service Division (DDSD) adjudicates all Social Security Disability Insurance and SSI disability claims filed in California on behalf of the Social Security Administration (SSA). Implemented statewide on February 1, 2008, CHOICE is administered by DDSD in partnership with the San Francisco Regional Social Security Administration Office and local SSA Offices in Sacramento, Chico, Santa Maria, San Jose, University Village, San Diego, Victorville, San Francisco, Watts, Compton and Santa Ana. Local initiatives were first established at DDSD's Los Angeles and Oakland offices in partnership with the local Social Security offices in Compton, Watts and San Francisco.

(more)

“Our employees work in close partnership with the SSA staff to provide quick, accurate service to Californians,” said Joe Carlin, Deputy Director of the DDSD. “SSA’s implementation of a national electronic business process and our shared goals for service make cooperative projects like this possible.”

The division spends nearly \$35 million annually for consultative medical examinations and processes more than 330,000 disability cases each year.

Benefits of the CHOICE Pilot:

- Expedites homeless benefits through a streamlined, time-saving application process.
- Homeless applicants receive immediate authorization for a free consultative medical examination upon meeting with SSA claims representatives.
- Assures homeless applicants can receive proper notification of benefits or eligibility determination.
- Enhances the evidence available to make informed determinations.
- Allows DDSD to secure essential medical evidence to help make a disability determination.

CDSS continues to work with advocacy groups, county welfare and mental health departments, community centers and Social Security field offices to offer support and improve service to the homeless population.

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